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# THE CHINESE STUDENT IN AMERICA\*

BY JOHN GRIER HIBBEN

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THE amount of indemnity for the loss of life and of property sustained during the Boxer rising which China agreed to pay to the United States was found to be in excess of the claims subsequently presented. Consequently, our government remitted a large portion of this indemnity, and China in turn has devoted this sum to an educational fund, the interest of which is supporting a large number of Government scholars in the schools and colleges of our country. During the last year there were upward of six hundred Chinese students in the United States, and recently over one hundred more have arrived in San Francisco. This intimate educational relation between China and the United States is a notable and unique instance of international comity which must have far-reaching results.

It is a fact profoundly significant and impressive that these young Chinese scholars who represent the veteran civilization of the immemorial past should come to this new land of the west to learn of us. And the question therefore naturally suggests itself, What have we to offer them which they cannot find in their own accumulated stores of learning and tradition? I do not for a moment believe that we possess any superior intellectual power, for we have no gifts of mind that are not also richly theirs. The Chinese scholar is justly famed for his extraordinary powers of acquisition and discernment in the labors of knowledge. Nor do we value learning for its own sake any more highly than they, for China is the only land in the world which recognizes an aristocracy of learning. Nor have we chanced upon any mysterious or occult source of truth which fate has concealed from the wise men of the east, that they should come

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to draw from our wells of knowledge. What then is the nature of this intellectual possession which they would gain from us? It is my purpose to attempt an answer to this question and to indicate what seems to me to be the characteristic features of our western learning which it is their determination in the years they are with us in America to study and to master.

Our body of knowledge has grown to its present proportions and significance through the continuous accumulation of signal inductive achievements. We have been possessed by an absorbing curiosity to understand the causes of things, and we are satisfied with no explanation of causal connection that is not definite and exact, and which does not penetrate to the sources and beginnings of the various phenomena about us. The distinctive mark, therefore, of our intellectual life, as I take it, is its method of investigation and research. We have determined to understand the secrets of nature; by patient observation and resourceful experiment we have laid siege to the very citadel of her kingdom. With us, reason has commanded precedent and prejudice; imagination has waited upon proof, and theory upon verification. We have endeavored to fortify every advanced position, and have learned to push forward into the territory of the unknown with caution, and yet with courage. In this way we have learned to understand nature, and by understanding, to assume rule and control in her realm, making captive her powers and compelling them to do our bidding.

There is also a second feature of our power in knowledge—namely, the increased efficiency which we have gained through the art of organization. As the forces of nature may be combined to produce desired results, in a similar manner human effort may be organized and directed so as to bring about certain particular ends.

I believe, moreover, that the lesson learned through the exact and detailed analysis of physical forces, and the possibility of combining them advantageously so as to serve useful purposes, has proved highly suggestive to the students of nature concerning the significant function of organization in dealing with the forces of human nature also. However this may be, the fact remains that in the history of our race scientific discovery and invention have been always most intimately associated with economic and political

organization. Just as science is systematized knowledge, social progress is systematized activity.

There is a third peculiar advantage which we as a people possess—namely, that we are exceedingly fortunate in inheriting the results of the combined experience of many nations. We are a composite people, with lines of intellectual ancestry running far back into every phase of European history through the past centuries. Philosophy and art have come to us from Greece, law from Rome, religion from Israel, and a destiny of progress from the Anglo-Saxon blood and spirit peculiarly our own. With this racial endowment, with this historical accumulation due both to the failures and the successes of the past, we should possess a wisdom tempered and tested for the needs of the modern day in which we live.

As these young students come to us from China to search out this body of knowledge and endeavor to make it their own, there is a serious danger which will surely beset them, and against which they should be particularly warned. It is a danger to which all scholars are liable; and in their eagerness to gain a working mastery of this new learning as rapidly as possible these oriental scholars may be peculiarly liable. I refer to the danger of a superficial understanding as regards both the content and the significance of knowledge. It will be easy for them, if I mistake not, to acquire from us a certain kind of surface information; but it is sincerely to be hoped that they will not remain complacently satisfied with it. Let them above all things cultivate the habit of penetrating beneath the surface in the studies which they may be pursuing, and sink their shafts to the lower levels of knowledge, so that they may develop minds which shall have comprehensive grasp and profound insight, compelled by ambition to realize the full measure of their possibilities, and also the possibilities of the subjects which they are investigating.

There are many subtle influences which these students will experience and which will tend to induce a superficial narrow-minded view of learning and of life. They have been sent to this country by their Government for a very definite and specific purpose—that of acquiring the particular kind of knowledge which they can put to immediate use upon their return to their own land. Consequently they will be especially alert to seize upon any and every item of informa-

tion which bears upon its face the stamp of utility. In their impatience, therefore, to secure the practical advantages of learning, they will naturally fall into the habit of demanding the obvious use of every phase of knowledge presented to them; and where this demand cannot be satisfied by a surface observation, they may not have the intellectual curiosity to search for the treasure which lies concealed in its deeper parts. There is a certain temper of mind which is impatient of everything which does not yield immediate results capable of practical test and visible demonstration. And it is most natural that young and eager students should insensibly take this point of view; for most of the Chinese students in America, if not all, are devoting themselves to tasks of some special interest. They desire particularly to gain that kind of knowledge which will prove serviceable to them in the great industrial and commercial world in which they are to take their place and play their part. They will be impatient to learn how to do things—how to build bridges and railways, develop mines, improve the prevailing methods of agriculture, superintend works of construction and of manufacture—in a word, to learn how to apply the technical knowledge which they may acquire to the needs and demands of the present age. But while pressing forward to grasp the fruit of knowledge they should not fail to possess themselves also of its precious seed.

It is one thing to learn the definite formula and to master the specific process so that one can imitate the method and duplicate the result which may be desired. It is quite a different thing to be able to comprehend the fundamental principles of a science in whose field one's specialty may happen to lie, and so permanently win the heart of knowledge. These students who will one day return to China must be prepared in their various labors to meet the unfamiliar situations which will inevitably confront them from time to time, and bring to bear upon their perplexities all the devices of inventive skill and practical resource. They will discover in the daily round of their work, whatever that work may happen to be, many a new problem for whose solution the usual and recognized methods of procedure will not avail. Only the mind richly equipped and deeply grounded both in fact and in theory will be found capable of dealing successfully with such emergencies; and it is certain that such emergencies are peculiarly liable to occur in a tran-

sition period of a nation's history such as that upon which China now appears to be entering. In the development of her natural resources, in the control of the vast millions of her people, mysterious in the potential power of their numbers alone, in the beginnings of the nation's second birth of progress, in all the varied needs and demands of the new China, her sons must possess that adequate intellectual power which cannot be imparted by maxim nor applied by formula. They must be able to command whatever they comprehend in such a manner that they will become skilled in the art of adaptation, of readjustment and reconstruction, molding the old material into new forms, as other occasions and other conditions may demand.

Moreover, the scholars of modern China are not to be satisfied merely with the acquisition of that knowledge which the world has already gained. It is quite possible also for some of their number to become original investigators in the regions of science yet unexplored and contributors to the wealth of its treasures. They may sow as well as reap in the field of learning. Why may not the scholars of China, with their natural temperament conducive to the habits of keen observation and reflective thought, become discoverers of truth which will place the nations of the earth under a debt of profound obligation? Let them not overlook the fact that the highest use of knowledge is to promote the progress of knowledge itself. Therefore, with all their getting, may they get that understanding which not merely induces a certain imitative aptitude, but which also begets creative power as well. Such a possibility they may well admit within the range of their imagination, and for a while at least in their younger years allow it to possess their ambition. And to this end, in the pursuit of knowledge let them count nothing insignificant and nothing impossible.

There is a second danger concerning which the Chinese students among us should be forewarned, and it is this, that in an age of transition the good which belongs to the old order may be sacrificed in the eagerness to realize the good of the new. This is a danger against which these young men must particularly guard, for they will become naturally so absorbed in the fulness of the present and so fascinated by the splendor of its possibilities that they will hardly turn their gaze toward the past, their own past, and the glories of its treasures which they can ill afford to lose. China ap-

pears to be facing a new era of great material progress, possibly greater than has yet occurred in the history of any nation of the world. In this period of material prosperity, therefore, there will be a constant temptation to forget the moral inheritance to which the Chinese have been born and which generation after generation has been transmitted through the teachings of their sages and the traditions of their people, and of which they now are both beneficiaries and guardians. There are some things which, however ancient, can never become antiquated and which can never lose point or significance. They remain age after age eternally fresh and vigorous, universal in their application and sovereign in power. Such are the profound moral precepts of the great Confucius, which the new China dare not outgrow. Such are the national characteristics of the Chinese people generally—their commercial truthfulness and honor, their filial piety and reverence for the sacredness of family ties, the spirit of contentment, of courtesy and of gratitude, the simplicity of needs and desires, and those homely virtues of industry, frugality, and thrift. Against such no material resources of any land can be weighed in the balance. Therefore I would earnestly appeal to them by their ancestral reverence to hold fast to these traditions which are the glory of their birthright and the promise of their destiny.

With the increase of wealth and power there will come to them many a temptation to lessen the rigor of moral authority in their life. The clear distinctions of right and wrong may become confused in the haste to increase dividends and to enhance values. The growing complexity of life may induce a restlessness and discontent quite inimical to the dignity which is bred of the simplicity of manner and spirit so conspicuously characteristic of the Chinese race. Upon them there rests a peculiar obligation to remain true to the best that they are in their endeavor to realize the best that they may become. They must learn that art of conservation which is essential to all true progress. This is not in our power to teach them. It is their task and their responsibility.

There is another grave danger, that these students of our affairs and institutions may take that surface view of things which will show them only the possibilities of their own career, and nothing above or beyond it. It is quite natural that their special work in life should absorb their attention and assume exclusive command of their powers. The pres-

ent is for China the period of opportunity; never before and perhaps never again in the history of their nation will young men and women of brains and purpose have so many chances of conspicuous success. The call to-day from their land is for the man who knows. In China to-day intelligence is rated at a high premium. In a certain sense the hour has come in advance of the man. At present there are more openings in the Middle Kingdom than there are persons of training and ability to fill them. Consequently the services of the capable and fit will naturally command liberal compensation and an honorable recognition. For such the future is splendid in possibility; neither fate nor fortune can bar their progress. Their own careers are assured. But is there not a more profound view for them to take of their life and its opportunity? These Chinese students in America are in a peculiar sense the wards of their nation. To the wise foresight and generous provision of their government are due the many privileges of an education which they are now enjoying, and which they will continue to enjoy in increasing measure. They cannot fail to be deeply sensible of the obligation resting upon them to make some return for the superior advantages which thus accrue to them. Henceforth in the years to come they will be marked men—marked by virtue of their intellectual rank, and the various prerogatives of power which they will assume by the native right of pre-eminent ability. However private their occupation, they will never be able to escape the responsibilities of public servants. They will belong to their country during the coming years of active service as well as in the present years of their preparation.

The most imperative need of China to-day is a standing army—a standing army, however, not of soldiers, but of wise and devoted patriots who will give serious thought and tireless energy to the solution of their country's most pressing problems. This is the peculiar vocation of these Government students. The call is not to arms; nevertheless it is a call to heroic deeds of national enterprise and valor. The new China looks to them and to the men of their kind to inaugurate and foster those influences among their countrymen which will tend to produce a more efficient central government. She looks to them to secure the protection of property and person to the outermost bounds of her broad empire, and to make the courts of law the seats of justice and



equity. She looks to them to create a sound system of taxation and of finance; to establish schools and colleges which will assure a free education to all and cause the light of reason to prevail; to devise improved methods of sanitation and hygiene and of protection against flood and famine; to found hospitals, asylums, and public institutions of various kinds for the care of the needy and deficient; and above all things to arouse a public-spirited enthusiasm among all classes, and so develop that sense of national pride and responsibility which is the distinctive mark of a united and progressive people. This is a task sufficiently difficult and varied to provoke the best thought of China's best men. They are to be congratulated who have a part, however small, in this splendid enterprise of the building of a nation.

There is every indication that the development of the new China is to be rapid. It may be slow at first in the process of getting under way, for it is exceedingly difficult to apply an adequate moving force to all parts of this great mass of people; but when once the initial inertia is overcome it will acquire tremendous momentum. And here the knowledge and wisdom of her trained and skilled scholars can enter as factors not only of development but of acceleration as well. For by the contributions which they may be able to make, China may be spared the slow processes of evolution through which European civilization necessarily has been compelled to pass, and be spared, also, much of the evil with which our modern civilization is cursed. It is possible for the men who have found knowledge at the sources to become wise prophets to their people, interpreting the lessons of the past and revealing the possibilities of a new future, they themselves going before, leading the way, and holding high the light for others to see and follow.

We are not so complacent concerning the unmitigated excellence of our civilization that we would wish the Chinese or any other people blindly and unintelligently to copy it. On the contrary, China as a nation is to develop a unique civilization of her own, one which shall realize in a peculiar manner the possibilities of her racial temperament and talent.

Finally I would mention another danger which will surely emerge in the experience of these students upon their return to China—namely, that in the very zeal of their patriotism they may possibly lose that world interest and sympathy

which are necessary to keep them in touch with the great movements of the human spirit as they are variously manifested among the nations of the earth. China is to have a place and a responsibility as a world empire. Her destiny is not merely to guard her shores from foreign invasion, and her affairs from foreign interference. China has also an international vocation to which her development will compel her to respond. Where there is progress there cannot be isolation; it is no more possible for a self-contained nation to be progressive than it is for a self-sufficient individual. There should be a commerce of sympathies and of ideas as well as of trade between the nations. One who is a true patriot must possess some feeling of reverence for man as man and be able to recognize beneath all racial differences the fundamental unity of humanity.

This is the significance of the missionary spirit which has impelled so many of our noble men and women to leave their native land and in voluntary exile to devote their lives to the people of China. The duty which a man owes to his fellows these foreign teachers, ministers, and physicians have interpreted in the most far-seeing and far-reaching sense. They have gone to the Chinese to bring healing to the body, strength to the spirit, and to point mankind upward. In the midst of an alien people they have illustrated what is meant by the love of humanity.

This love of humanity, however, does not always take the form of missionary zeal and enterprise. It may manifest itself in innumerable ways; and so far as it may lay hold upon the spirit of these young Chinese patriots in any degree whatsoever it will tend to broaden their sympathies, deepen their human interests, and enable them to appreciate the significance of life and life's values from a commanding cosmic point of view. Some of their number no doubt will take a prominent part in the affairs of State; they may be called upon in the course of their careers to enter into diplomatic relations with the representatives of other nations. If so, it is to be sincerely hoped that they will cultivate that spirit of justice and fair dealing which instinctively recognizes the mutual rights and mutual duties universally obtaining between man and man, nation and nation, the world over.

America has always stood for the policy of "China for the Chinese." We believe in it, and we are pledged to sup-

port it. But we would not have the students who have learned of us interpret this phrase in a narrow and provincial manner. Let them hold to it as a principle of justice and as the declaration of their rights of territorial possession and of administrative autonomy; but let them not proclaim it as a creed of complacency, or as a challenge of defiance.

I have no sympathy with the piratical policy of "China for the world"—that is, China for the world to invade, despoil, and divide. I do believe, however, most profoundly in the possibility of the "world for China," the world of which China may become an integral part, the world from which China may receive and to which China may give, the world as the field of her opportunity and her responsibility.

In looking over the proof of this address, I feel constrained, on account of the recent dramatic events in China, to quote certain words of counsel from a letter of a Government official in Shanghai to his son, who is in one of our American universities:—"Do not think of returning to us on account of our present troubles. Your duty is to stay where you are; go on with your work, and prepare yourself to serve your country which will need you later."

JOHN GRIER HIBBEN.